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STATE FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IIP  
NSC FOR WATERS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KAPO](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPT: NEWSPAPERS STRIKE FOR PRESS FREEDOM

REF: A. CAIRO 2936

[1](#)B. CAIRO 2896  
[1](#)C. CAIRO 2835

[1](#)1. (U) Twenty-two independent and opposition newspapers did not publish on October 7 in protest of recent government actions against press freedom, including the sentencing of four editors-in-chief to a year in prison for criticizing president Mubarak and senior government officials (ref C), and a separate case against the editor-in-chief of the independent Al Dustour newspaper for allegedly spreading false rumors against President Mubarak (ref A). Several websites, including the Muslim Brotherhood's "ikwanonline.com" also suspended activities in support of the press publishing boycott. Government-owned or controlled newspapers, on the other hand, loudly criticized the decision not to publish, particularly as it fell on a national holiday marking the start of Egypt's 1973 war with Israel.

[1](#)2. (U) According to Jamal Fahmi, chief of the Freedom Committee at the Egyptian Press Syndicate, "Opting not to go to print is a civilized, democratic protest against this glaring aggression on the freedom of the press." Others, however, saw the ever-present "foreign hand" behind the protests, with the editor of the government-backed Al Gomhuria newspaper, Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, claiming in an op-ed "...some of these (striking) newspapers rely on American funding and other newspapers are funded by the Muslim Brotherhood, and therefore have an agenda which is different from that of the nation." Still others see the stoppage in the context of wider societal concerns about shrinking freedoms.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: Press freedom, once hailed as the brightest spot on the limited horizon of Egyptian political reform, has taken some hard knocks lately. Mubarak is famously on the record (in 2005 and 2006) as saying he would not use his powers as president to act against those who "misuse" the freedom of the press, and that no journalist would be imprisoned for expressing an opinion. Interestingly, those who filed charges in the case against the four editors were all members of Mubarak's NDP party. While Egypt's press remains robust, it appears that the government's line has moved from "no prison for journalists" to "journalists must exercise their freedoms responsibly."  
JONES